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(54) **VIRTUAL IMAGE DEVICE**

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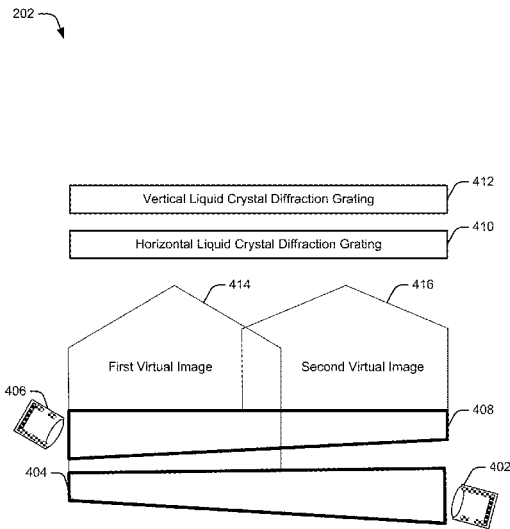
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See application file for complete search history.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

This document describes various apparatuses embodying, and techniques for implementing, a virtual image device. The virtual image device includes a projector and a lens configured to generate a virtual image as well as two diffraction gratings, substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other, that act to increase a field-of-view of the virtual image. The virtual image device can be implemented as a pair of eyeglasses and controlled to generate the virtual image in front of lenses of the eyeglasses so that a wearer of the eyeglasses, looking through the lenses of the eyeglasses, sees the virtual image.

20 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



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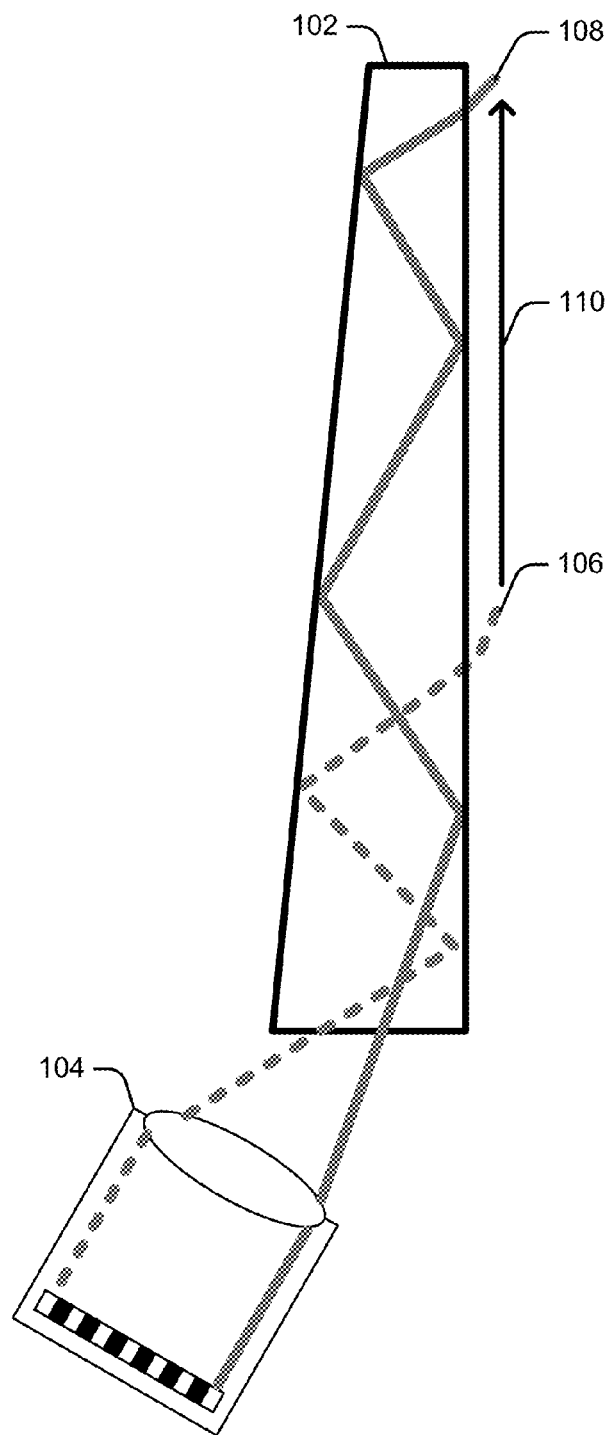
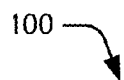


Fig. 1

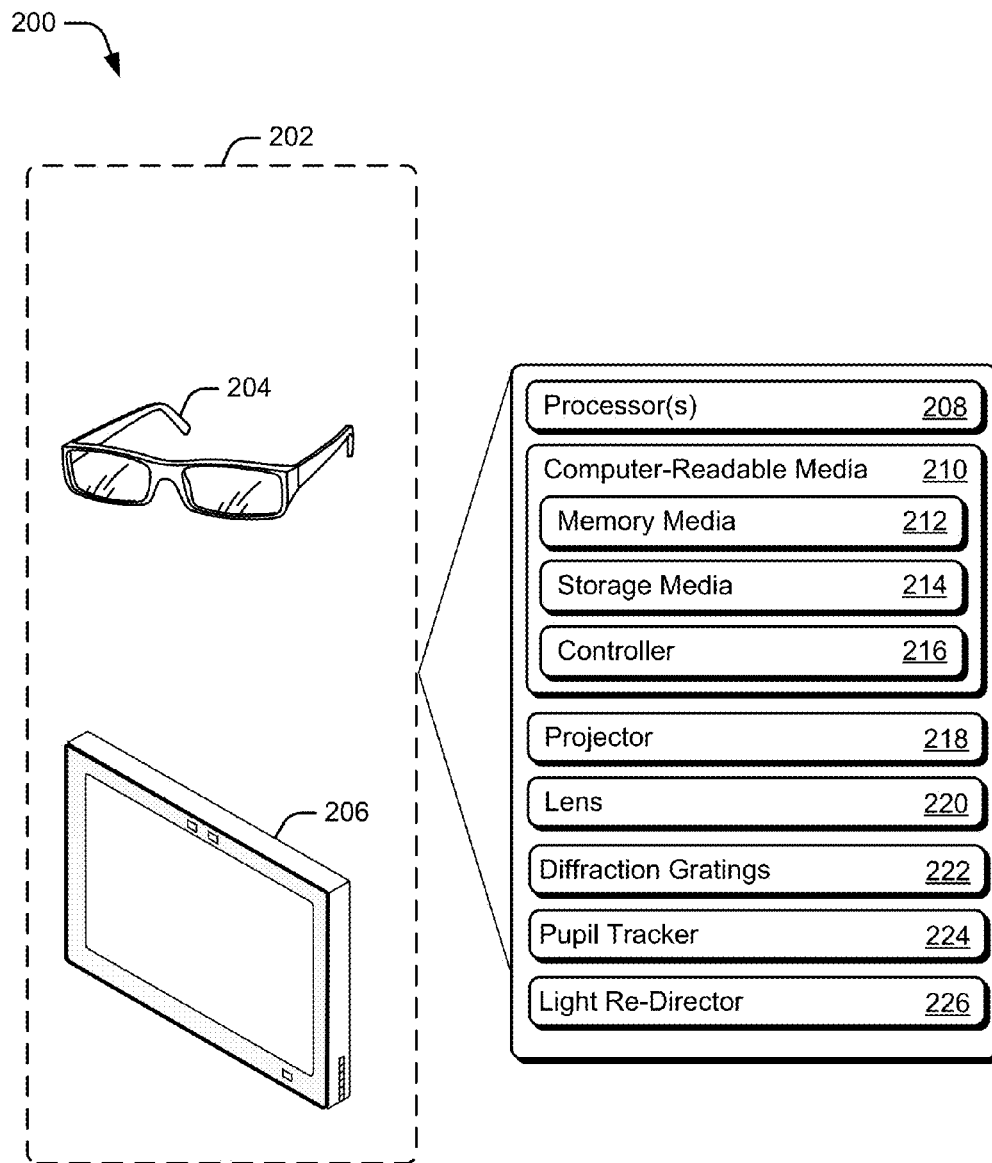


Fig. 2

222

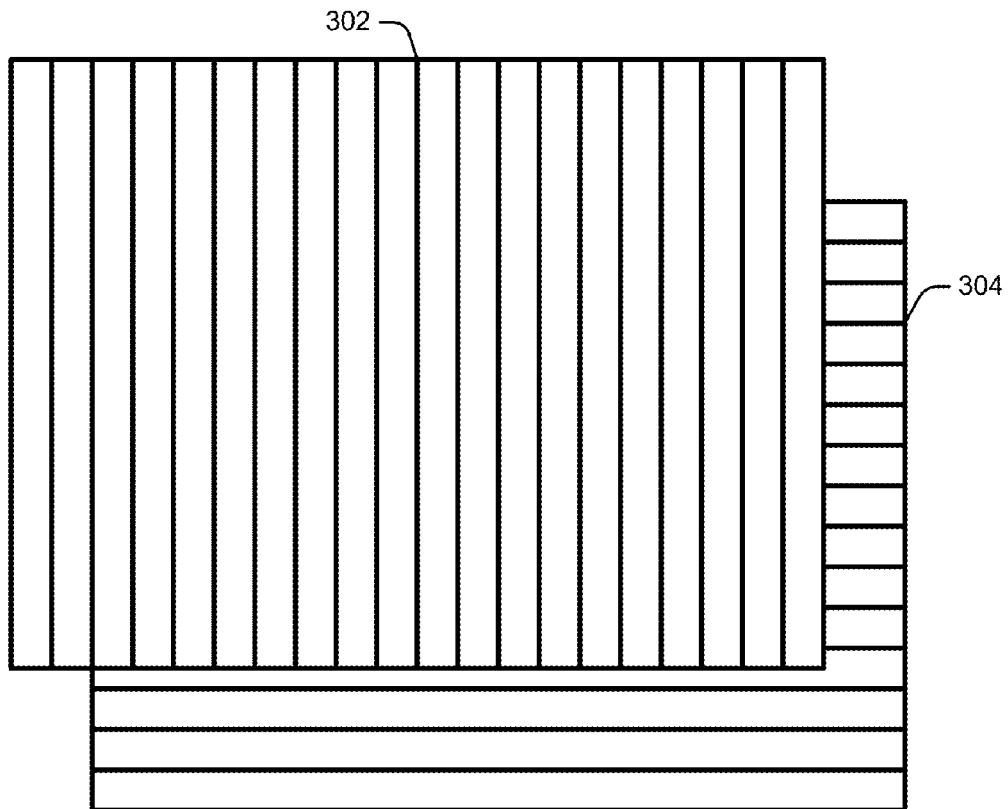



Fig. 3

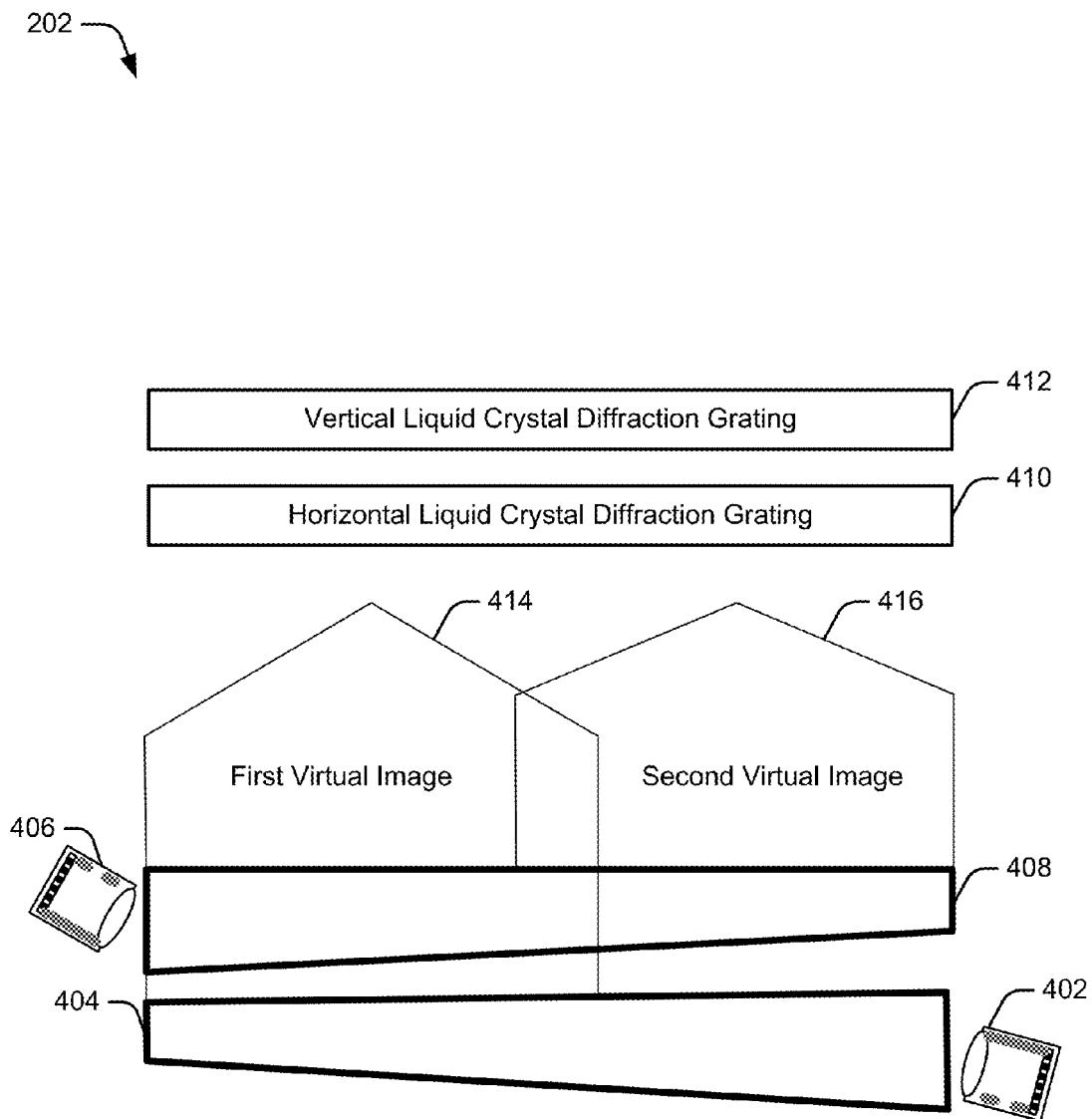


Fig. 4

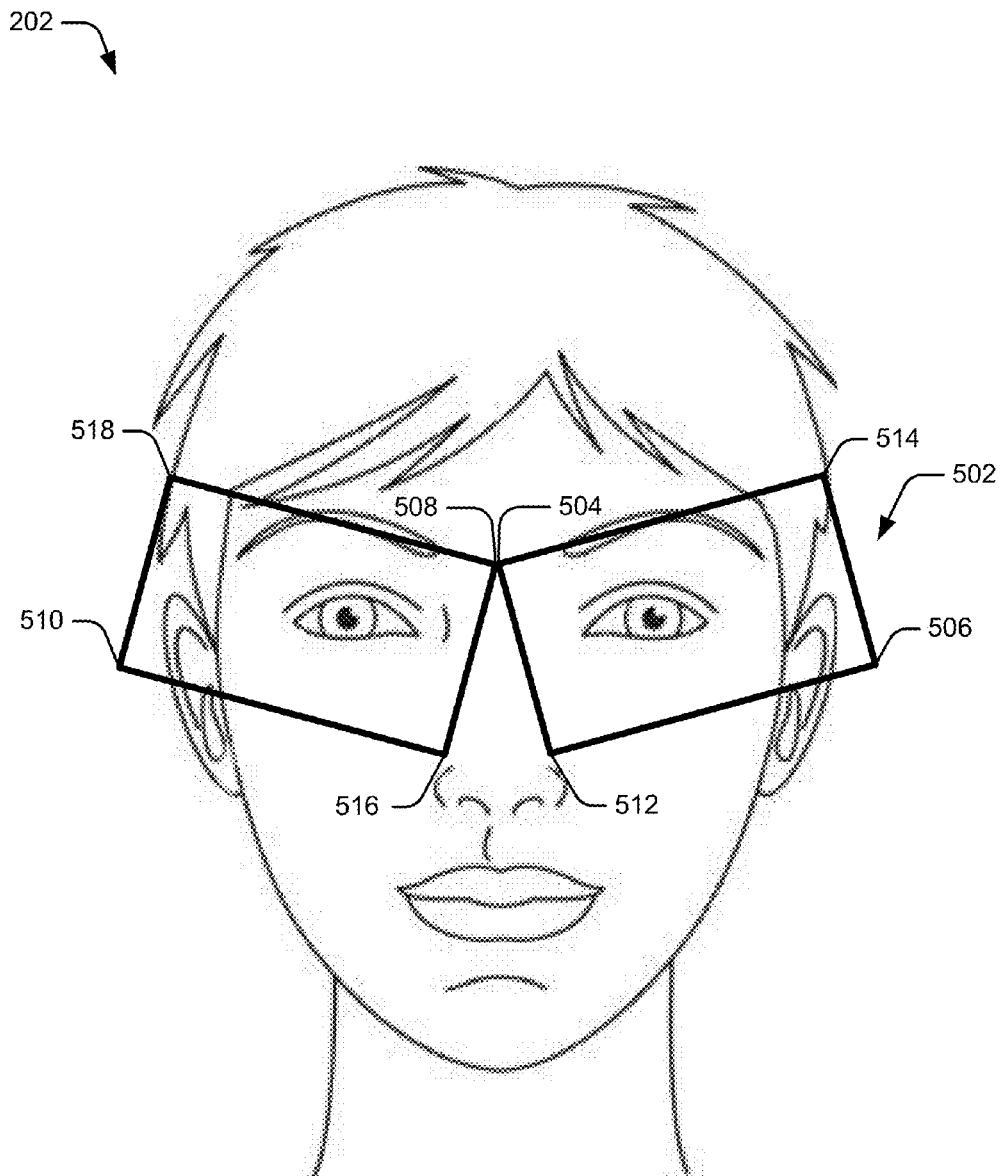


Fig. 5

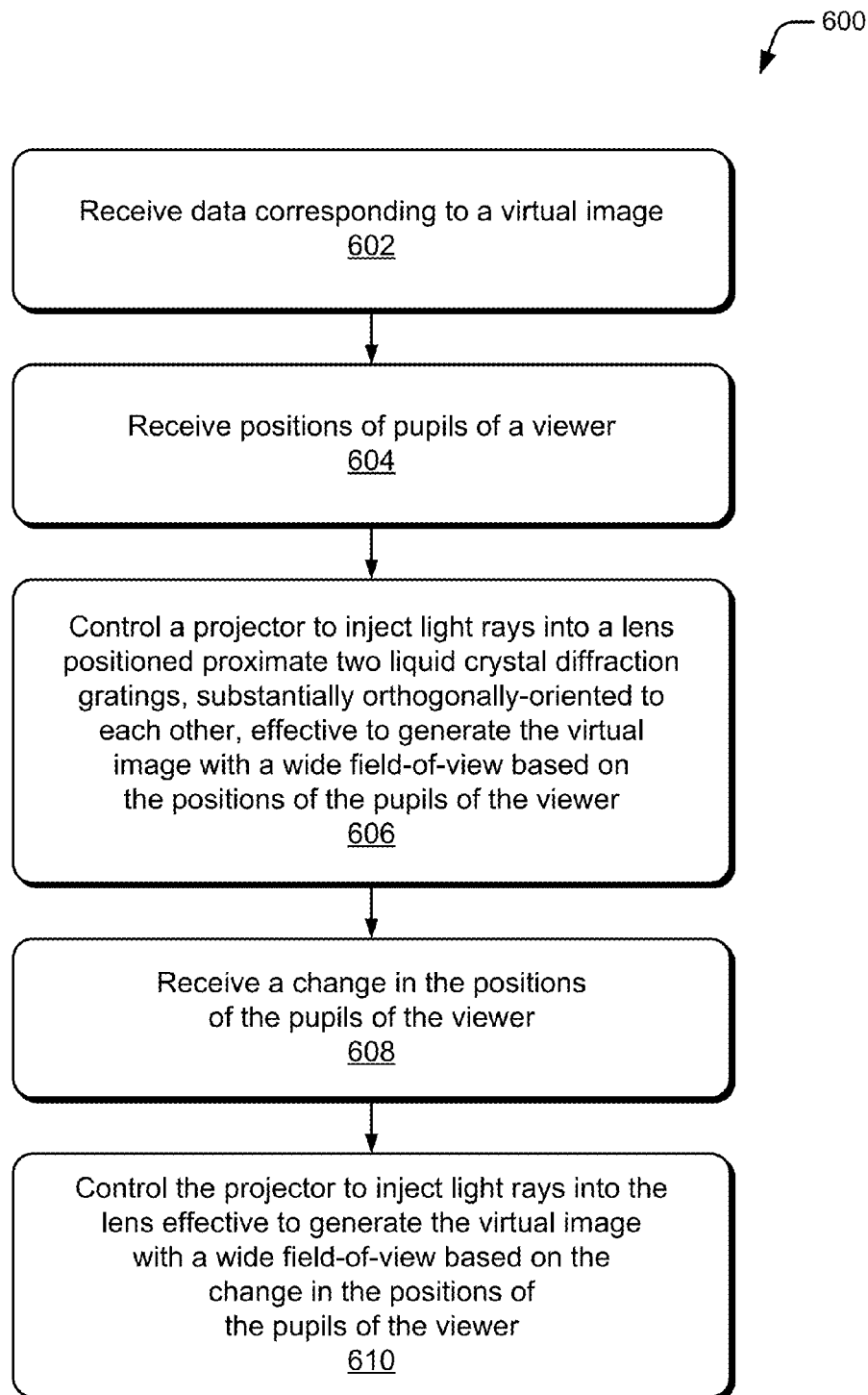


Fig. 6

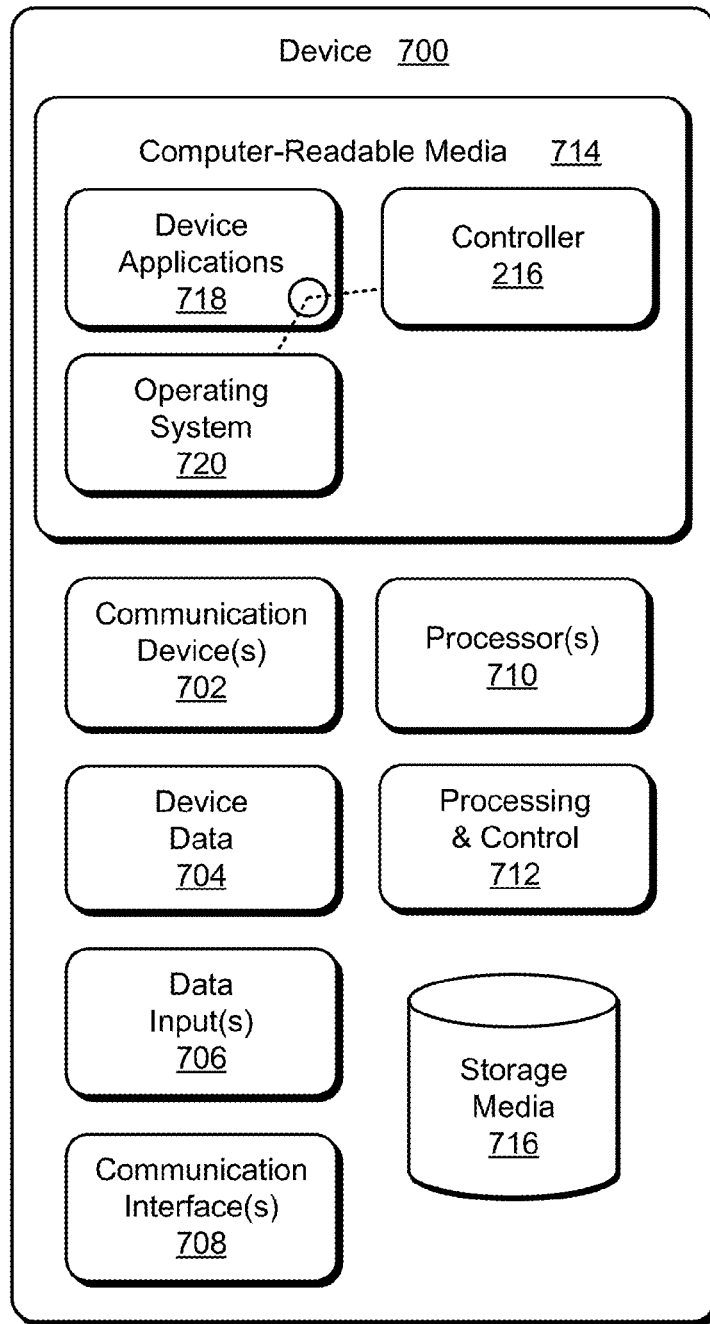


Fig. 7

1

VIRTUAL IMAGE DEVICE

BACKGROUND

A virtual image can be made by pointing a video projector into a lens to project the virtual image from a surface of the lens. A pair of eyeglasses, or spectacles, can include a virtual image projector to project a virtual image in front of the eyes of a wearer of the eyeglasses. Virtual image projectors small enough to be placed on a pair of eyeglasses, however, typically project a virtual image with a narrow field-of-view.

SUMMARY

This document describes various apparatuses embodying, and techniques for implementing, a virtual image device. The virtual image device includes a projector and a lens configured to generate a virtual image as well as two diffraction gratings, substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other, that act to increase a field-of-view of the virtual image. The virtual image device can be implemented as a pair of eyeglasses and controlled to generate the virtual image in front of lenses of the eyeglasses so that a wearer of the eyeglasses sees the virtual image. This summary is provided to introduce simplified concepts in a simplified form that are further described below in the Detailed Description. This summary is not intended to identify essential features of the claimed subject matter, nor is it intended for use in determining the scope of the claimed subject matter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Embodiments of a virtual image device are described with reference to the following drawings. The same numbers are used throughout the drawings to reference like features and components:

FIG. 1 illustrates an example environment of a projector and a wedge light guide configured to generate a virtual image.

FIG. 2 illustrates an example environment in which a virtual image device can be implemented.

FIG. 3 is a detailed example of two liquid crystal diffraction gratings that are substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other.

FIG. 4 is a more-detailed example of a virtual image device.

FIG. 5 is another more-detailed example of virtual image device when implemented as a pair of rectangular eyeglasses in accordance with one embodiment.

FIG. 6 illustrates an example method for controlling a virtual image device to generate a virtual image.

FIG. 7 illustrates an example device in which techniques for a virtual image device can be implemented.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Overview

It is well known that if a picture is placed in the focal plane of a lens, and an eye looks through the lens from its other focal plane, that the eye will see a virtual image. This arrangement, however, is bulky and unsuitable for integration into a pair of eyeglasses and other slim devices. A wedge light guide is a lens with a focal plane at one end of the light guide so that the arrangement is slim. Consider for example, FIG. 1, which illustrates an example embodiment 100 of a wedge light guide 102 and a projector 104. Projector 104 projects light rays 106 and 108 into the thick end of the wedge light guide causing the

2

light rays to reflect back and forth at progressively steeper angles until a “critical angle” is reached, at which point the light rays exit the wedge light guide causing a projected image 110 to emerge from the face of the wedge.

However, a wedge light guide, by itself, is unsuitable to generate virtual images when coupled to a pair of eyeglasses for the following reasons: 1) the focal plane of the wedge light guide is one dimensional making it difficult to project a large virtual image, 2) the focal length of the wedge light guide is too large, and 3) the field-of-view of a virtual image projected by the wedge light guide is too narrow.

This document describes various apparatuses embodying, and techniques for implementing, a virtual image device. This virtual image device includes a projector and a lens configured to generate a virtual image, such as a wedge light guide type of lens. In some embodiments, the lens is a wedge light guide. The virtual image device further includes two diffraction gratings, substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other, that act to increase a field-of-view of the virtual image. The two diffraction gratings can include a horizontal liquid crystal diffraction grating configured to increase a vertical field-of-view of the virtual image and a vertical liquid crystal diffraction grating configured to increase a horizontal field-of-view of the virtual image. The virtual image device may be implemented as a pair of eyeglasses and controlled to generate the virtual image for a wearer of the eyeglasses.

Example Environment

FIG. 2 is an illustration of an example environment 200 in which a virtual image device can be implemented. Environment 200 can be implemented in a virtual image device 202, which is illustrated, by way of example and not limitation, as a pair of eyeglasses 204. Eyeglasses 204 can include sunglasses, spectacles, goggles, or any other type of head-mounted display device. While virtual image device 202 will be described as being implemented as a pair of eyeglasses 204, it is to be noted that virtual image device may also be implemented as any other type of virtual image display device that can generate three-dimensional (3D) and/or multi-view images, such as a television device 206.

Virtual image device 202 includes processor(s) 208 and computer-readable media 210, which includes memory media 212 and storage media 214. Computer-readable media 210 also includes a controller 216. How controller 216 is implemented and used varies, and is described as part of the methods discussed below.

Virtual image device 202 includes a projector 218 and a lens 220 that can be controlled by controller 216 to generate a virtual image that can be viewed by a wearer of eyeglasses 204, referred to as “viewer” herein. The frame of a pair of eyeglasses may be slightly curved, which may render regular projectors unsuitable. Therefore, in some embodiments, projector 218 is a holographic projector that can be controlled to adjust to the curvature of a pair of eyeglasses. In some embodiments, lens 220 can be implemented as a wedge light guide. As described herein, the term “wedge light guide” describes a wedge-shaped lens or light guide that permits light input into the wedge light guide to fan out within the wedge light guide via total internal reflection before reaching a critical angle for internal reflection and exiting via another surface of the wedge light guide. The light may exit the wedge light guide at a glancing angle relative to the viewing surface of the wedge light guide to generate a virtual image.

Virtual image device 202 further includes two diffraction gratings 222, substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other, configured to increase a field-of-view of the virtual image. As described herein, the term “diffraction gratings” includes any type of diffractive optical element. In some

embodiments, the diffraction gratings comprise liquid crystal diffraction gratings. Projector **218**, lens **220**, and diffraction gratings **222** may be coupled to lenses of eyeglasses **204** to generate a virtual image of infinitely distant objects directly in front of the viewer's eye to cause a pupil of the viewer's eye to adjust to an infinite or near-infinite focal length to focus on the objects. Projector **218** may be at least partially transparent so that the viewer can see external objects as well as virtual images when looking through the lenses of eyeglasses **204**. In addition, it is to be appreciated that projector **218** may be small enough to fit onto the lenses of eyeglasses **204** without being noticeable to the viewer.

In some embodiments, projector **218** can be implemented as two projectors to generate a virtual image in front of each of the viewer's eyes. When two projectors are used, each projector **218** can project the same virtual image concurrently so that the viewer's right eye and left eye receive the same image at the same time. Alternately, the projectors may project slightly different images concurrently, so that the viewer receives a stereoscopic image (e.g., a three-dimensional image).

In some embodiments, virtual image device **202** may also include a pupil tracker **224** that locates and tracks positions of the pupils of the viewer. Pupil tracker **224** provides these positions to controller **216** to enable the controller to control virtual image device **202** to render the virtual image based on the positions of the pupils of the viewer. For example, controller **216** can control virtual image device **202** to generate a virtual image that concentrates through pupils of a viewer. In some embodiments, pupil tracker **224** is further configured to determine a change in the positions of the pupils. For example, pupil tracker **224** can determine when the pupils move left, right, up, or down. Pupil tracker **224** provides this change in the positions of the pupils to controller **216** to enable controller **216** to control virtual image device **202** to generate the virtual image based on the change in the positions of the pupils.

In some cases, pupil tracker **224** includes an infrared-sensitive camera and a synchronously modulated infra-red LED. Pupil tracker **224** locates the positions of the pupils by taking a picture of the viewer with a flash and identifying "red eye" caused by the flash to locate the positions of the pupils. For example, the positions of the pupils, as indicated by the red eye, can be identified in an otherwise low contrast infra-red image of the viewer's face.

In some cases, virtual image device **202** includes light re-director **226**, which is located adjacent to a viewing surface of lens **220** to diffuse collimated light emitted by lens **220**. This collimated light may exit lens **220** at a glancing angle with respect to the viewing surface. Thus, light re-director **226** can re-direct the emitted light of lens **220** towards the pupils of a viewer and may provide a diffusing function in one dimension. Light re-director **226** can be configured as any suitable structure, such as a turning film of prisms or a light-guide panel having a prismatic textured surface. By varying angles of prisms or prismatic features over a surface of light re-director **226**, light re-director **226** can be configured to have optical power capable of directing the collimated light emitted from the viewing surface of lens **220** towards the pupils of the viewer.

In order to generate a virtual image, light rays from projector **218** are deflected as the light rays exit lens **220** so that the light rays concentrate through each pupil of the viewer. A two-dimensional liquid crystal display (LCD), which modulates light rays in both the vertical and horizontal directions, can be configured to deflect the light rays to concentrate through each pupil of the viewer. For example, a two-dimen-

sional LCD can be controlled to alternate between being opaque and transparent so that it acts like a diffraction grating. Alternately, the LCD can be configured to modulate the phase of light so it acts like a blazed diffraction grating. Conventional LCDs, however, have pixels no smaller than five microns so the deflection angle is only a few degrees. This small deflection angle can cause a small virtual image to be generated. Furthermore, two-dimensional LCDs may use an active matrix of transistors. When the LCDs are opaque, the transistors cause aperture diffraction of external light coming from the outside world. Accordingly, in accordance with various embodiments, virtual image device **202** uses two diffraction gratings **222**, substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other, to deflect light rays leaving lens **220** to cause the light rays to concentrate through the pupils of the viewer.

In an embodiment, the two liquid crystal diffraction gratings **222** can be positioned behind an LCD of virtual image device **202** to scan the illumination of the LCD. Using two liquid crystal diffraction gratings **222** to scan the illumination separate from the LCD enables virtual image device **202** to be equipped with a low resolution LCD because the LCD does not need to scan the image.

FIG. 3 illustrates a detailed example of two diffraction gratings **222** that are substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other. In some embodiments, the two diffraction gratings are passive liquid crystal diffraction gratings that do not require transistors to modulate light rays. By eliminating the need for transistors, the passive liquid crystal diffraction gratings will have substantially less unwanted diffraction of external light. Each of the two liquid crystal diffraction gratings **222** are configured to scan light rays in a single direction (e.g., vertically or horizontally). Scanning light rays in a single direction is known in the art, and is not discussed in detail herein.

Liquid crystal diffraction gratings **222**, in this example, include vertical liquid crystal diffraction grating **302** and horizontal liquid crystal diffraction grating **304**, which are substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other. Vertical liquid crystal diffraction grating **302** includes vertical diffraction gratings to scan the virtual image horizontally (e.g., side to side). Horizontal liquid crystal diffraction grating **304** includes horizontal diffraction gratings to scan the virtual image vertically (e.g., up and down). By aligning vertical liquid crystal diffraction grating **302** orthogonal to horizontal liquid crystal diffraction grating **304**, the virtual image can be separately scanned at a large angle in both the horizontal and vertical directions. The two liquid crystal diffraction gratings, therefore, increase the field-of-view of the virtual image on both a horizontal and a vertical plane to generate a virtual image with a wide field-of-view.

FIG. 4 illustrates a detailed example of virtual image device **202** in accordance with various embodiments. In this example, virtual image device **202** includes a first projector **402** that injects light into a first wedge light guide **404**, a second projector **406** that injects light into a second wedge light guide **408**, a horizontal liquid crystal diffraction grating **410**, and a vertical liquid crystal diffraction grating **412**. In this example, horizontal liquid crystal diffraction grating **410** is between the wedges and vertical liquid crystal diffraction grating **412**. Alternately, the positions of the diffraction gratings can be switched so that vertical liquid crystal diffraction grating **412** is between the wedges and horizontal liquid crystal diffraction grating **410**. Light injected by first projector **402** into first light guide **404** generates a first virtual image **414** that can be viewed by a right eye of the viewer. Light injected by second projector **406** into second wedge light

5

guide 408 generates a second virtual image 416 that can be viewed by a left eye of the viewer.

Horizontal liquid crystal diffraction grating 410 receives first virtual image 414 and second virtual image 416 and increases the vertical field-of-view of the first virtual image and the second virtual image by scanning the virtual images in the vertical direction. Vertical liquid crystal diffraction grating 412 receives first virtual image 414 and second virtual image 416 and increases the horizontal field-of-view of the first virtual image and the second virtual image by scanning the virtual images in the horizontal direction. In some embodiments, first virtual image 414 and second virtual image 416 are the same virtual image so that the right eye and left eye of the viewer see the same virtual image. Alternately, first virtual image 414 and second virtual image 416 may be slightly different virtual images, so that the viewer receives a stereoscopic image.

In some embodiments, virtual image device 202 can be implemented as rectangular eyeglasses with rectangular lenses to further increase the field-of-view of virtual images projected by virtual image device 202. FIG. 5 illustrates an example of virtual image device 202 when implemented as rectangular eyeglasses 502. In this example the lenses of rectangular eyeglasses 502 are tilted, relative to a face of a wearer of the eyeglasses, to take advantage of the diagonal from corners 504 to 506, from corners 508 to 510, from corners 512 to 514, and from corners 516 to 518 of rectangular eyeglasses 502 to maximize the field-of-view of virtual images generated by the eyeglasses. In other words, by tilting the glasses, a wider viewing surface is created because the length of the diagonal of a rectangle is longer than the length of either side of the rectangle.

Additionally, by tilting rectangular eyeglasses 502 relative to the wearer's face, a converged area is created below the nose of the wearer of the eyeglasses, which can be used to display virtual images for hand-eye-coordination tasks. For example, corners 512 and 516 create a stereo area where each eye of the wearer can look down to where the wearer's hands typically are located to give an extended stereo area to display virtual images for hand-eye-coordination tasks. The configuration of rectangular eyeglasses 502 also creates "heads up" zones at the upper corners 504, 508, 514, and 518, which enables display of information that is out of the way of the wearer's primary focus of interest. For example, corners 504 and 508 enable the field-of-view for each eye of the wearer to extend across the nose to create a stereo area where each eye can look across the nose to see what the other eye sees. Corners 514 and 518, located at the upper outer corners of rectangular eyeglasses 502, provide an extended heads up display area.

Example Method

FIG. 6 is flow diagram depicting an example method 600 for controlling a virtual image device to generate a virtual image. Block 602 receives data corresponding to a virtual image (e.g., video data corresponding to a movie or to television programming) Block 604 receives positions of pupils of a viewer. For example, controller 216 receives the positions of the pupils of the viewer from pupil tracker 224.

Block 606 controls a projector to inject light rays into a lens positioned proximate two liquid crystal diffraction gratings, substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other, effective to generate the virtual image with a wide field-of-view based on the positions of the pupils of the viewer. For example, controller 216 controls projector 218 to inject light rays into lens 220 positioned proximate two liquid crystal diffraction grat-

6

ings 222 effective to generate the virtual image with a wide field-of-view based on the positions of the pupils of the viewer.

Block 608 receives a change in the positions of the pupils of the viewer. Block 610 controls the projector to inject light rays into the lens effective to generate the virtual image with a wide field-of-view based on the change in the positions of the pupils of the viewer. For example, controller 216 controls projector 218 to inject light rays into lens 220 positioned proximate the two liquid crystal diffraction gratings 222 effective to generate the virtual image with a wide field-of-view based on the change in the positions of the pupils of the viewer.

Example Device

FIG. 7 illustrates various components of example device 700 that can be implemented as any type of client, server, and/or display device as described with reference to the previous FIGS. 1-6 to implement apparatuses embodying, and techniques enabling, a virtual image device. In embodiments, device 700 can be implemented as one or a combination of a wired and/or wireless device, a head-mounted display device (e.g., eyeglasses, sunglasses, etc.) as a form of flat panel display, television, television client device (e.g., television set-top box, digital video recorder (DVR), etc.), consumer device, computer device, server device, portable computer device, user device, communication device, video processing and/or rendering device, appliance device, gaming device, electronic device, and/or as another type of device. Device 700 may also be associated with a viewer (e.g., a person or user) and/or an entity that operates the device such that a device describes logical devices that include users, software, firmware, and/or a combination of devices.

Device 700 includes communication devices 702 that enable wired and/or wireless communication of device data 704 (e.g., received data, data that is being received, data scheduled for broadcast, data packets of the data, etc.). The device data 704 or other device content can include configuration settings of the device, media content stored on the device, and/or information associated with a user of the device. Media content stored on device 700 can include any type of audio, video, and/or image data. Device 700 includes one or more data inputs 706 via which any type of data, media content, and/or inputs can be received, such as user-selectable inputs, messages, music, television media content, recorded video content, and any other type of audio, video, and/or image data received from any content and/or data source.

Device 700 also includes communication interfaces 708, which can be implemented as any one or more of a serial and/or parallel interface, a wireless interface, any type of network interface, a modem, and as any other type of communication interface. The communication interfaces 708 provide a connection and/or communication links between device 700 and a communication network by which other electronic, computing, and communication devices communicate data with device 700.

Device 700 includes one or more processors 710 (e.g., any of microprocessors, controllers, and the like), which process various computer-executable instructions to control the operation of device 700 and to enable techniques for implementing a virtual image device. Alternatively or in addition, device 700 can be implemented with any one or combination of hardware, firmware, or fixed logic circuitry that is implemented in connection with processing and control circuits, which are generally identified at 712. Although not shown, device 700 can include a system bus or data transfer system that couples the various components within the device. A system bus can include any one or combination of different

bus structures, such as a memory bus or memory controller, a peripheral bus, a universal serial bus, and/or a processor or local bus that utilizes any of a variety of bus architectures.

Device **700** also includes computer-readable storage media **714**, such as one or more memory devices that enable persistent and/or non-transitory data storage (i.e., in contrast to mere signal transmission), examples of which include random access memory (RAM), non-volatile memory (e.g., any one or more of a read-only memory (ROM), non-volatile RAM (NVRAM), flash memory, EPROM, EEPROM, etc.), and a disk storage device. A disk storage device may be implemented as any type of magnetic or optical storage device, such as a hard disk drive, a recordable and/or rewritable compact disc (CD), any type of a digital versatile disc (DVD), and the like. Device **700** can also include a mass storage media device **716**.

Computer-readable storage media **714** provides data storage mechanisms to store the device data **704**, as well as various device applications **718** and any other types of information and/or data related to operational aspects of device **700**. For example, an operating system **720** can be maintained as a computer application with the computer-readable storage media **714** and executed on processors **710**. The device applications **718** may include a device manager, such as any form of a control application, software application, signal-processing and control module, code that is native to a particular device, a hardware abstraction layer for a particular device, and so on.

The device applications **718** also include any system components or modules to implement techniques using or enabling a virtual image device. In this example, the device applications **718** can include controller **216** for controlling a virtual image device.

Conclusion

This document describes various apparatuses embodying, and techniques for implementing, a virtual image device. Although the invention has been described in language specific to structural features and/or methodological acts, it is to be understood that the invention defined in the appended claims is not necessarily limited to the specific features or acts described. Rather, the specific features and acts are disclosed as example forms of implementing the claimed invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A virtual image device comprising: a projector configured to output light rays; a lens configured to receive the light rays from the projector and to generate a virtual image; and two diffraction gratings, positioned proximate the lens, to increase a field-of-view of the virtual image, the two diffraction gratings substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other, a first diffraction grating of the two diffraction gratings configured to increase a vertical field-of-view of the virtual image and a second diffraction grating of the two diffraction gratings configured to increase a horizontal field-of-view of the virtual image.

2. The virtual image device as described in claim 1, wherein the two diffraction gratings comprise passive liquid crystal diffraction gratings.

3. The virtual image device as described in claim 2, wherein the virtual image device comprises a pair of eyeglasses, and wherein the projector, the lens, and the two passive liquid crystal diffraction gratings are coupled to the pair of eyeglasses to generate the virtual image for a wearer of the pair of eyeglasses.

4. The virtual image device as described in claim 1, wherein the first diffraction grating comprises a horizontal diffraction grating, and wherein the second diffraction grating comprises a vertical diffraction grating.

5. A virtual image device as described in claim 1, wherein the virtual image device comprises a pair of eyeglasses, and wherein lenses of the pair of eyeglasses are rectangular, and tilted relative to a face of the wearer, to maximize the vertical field-of-view and the horizontal field-of-view of the virtual image.

6. The virtual image device as described in claim 1, wherein the virtual image device comprises a three-dimensional display device or a multi-view display device.

7. The virtual image device as described in claim 1, further comprising a pupil tracker configured to locate positions of pupils of a viewer, wherein the virtual image device is controlled to generate the virtual image based on the positions of the pupils.

8. The virtual image device as described in claim 7, further comprising a light re-director to deflect the virtual image based on the positions of the pupils of the viewer.

9. The virtual image device as described in claim 1, wherein the lens comprises a wedge light guide, the wedge light guide configured to receive the light rays from the projector and to generate the virtual image by projecting the virtual image from a surface of the wedge light guide.

10. The virtual image device as described in claim 1, wherein the lens is further configured to generate the virtual image for a first eye of a viewer and the virtual image device further comprises:

an additional projector configured to output additional light rays; and

an additional lens configured to receive the additional light rays from the additional projector and to generate an additional virtual image for a second eye of the viewer.

11. The virtual image device as described in claim 1, wherein the projector is at least partially transparent.

12. The virtual image device as described in claim 1, wherein the projector comprises a holographic projector.

13. A head-mounted display device comprising:

a pupil tracker configured to locate a position of a first pupil and a position of a second pupil of a wearer of the head-mounted display device;

a first projector configured to inject light rays into a first wedge light guide effective to generate a first virtual image based on the position of the first pupil;

a second projector configured to inject light rays corresponding to the virtual image into a second wedge light guide effective to generate a second virtual image based on the position of the second pupil;

two liquid crystal diffraction gratings, substantially orthogonally-oriented to each other, comprising:

a horizontal liquid crystal diffraction grating configured to increase a vertical field-of-view of the first virtual image and the second virtual image; and

a vertical liquid crystal diffraction grating configured to increase a horizontal field-of-view of the first virtual image and the second virtual image.

14. The head-mounted display device as described in claim 13, wherein the head-mounted display device is a pair of eyeglasses.

15. The head-mounted display device as described in claim 13, wherein the head-mounted display device comprises a pair of eyeglasses, with rectangular lenses that are tilted relative to a face of the wearer, to further increase the vertical field-of-view and the horizontal field-of-view of the virtual image.

16. The head-mounted display device as described in claim 13, further comprising a turning film configured to direct the first virtual image to the first pupil and to direct the second virtual image to the second pupil.

17. A virtual image device comprising:
a pupil tracker configured to locate positions of pupils of a viewer;
a projector configured to output light rays;
a lens configured to receive the light rays from the projector 5
and to generate a virtual image based on the position of the pupils of the viewer; and
two diffraction gratings, positioned proximate the lens, to increase a field-of-view of the virtual image, the two diffraction gratings substantially orthogonally-oriented 10
to each other.

18. The virtual image device as described in claim **17**, further comprising a light re-director to deflect the virtual image based on the positions of the pupils of the viewer.

19. The virtual image device as described in claim **17**, 15
wherein the lens comprises a wedge light guide, the wedge light guide configured to receive the light rays from the projector and to generate the virtual image by projecting the virtual image from a surface of the wedge light guide.

20. The virtual image device as described in claim **17**, 20
wherein the virtual image device comprises a head-mounted display device.

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